

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



Tornado Debris and Asbestos Concerns

Debris on the ground and construction material that remains in structures needing demolition may contain asbestos. Asbestos is a group of strong, heat-resistant fibrous minerals which have been used in a variety of construction materials. Asbestos-containing materials can be found in wall construction materials, wall insulation, pipe insulation, attic insulation and roof products (like felt or shingles).

Because exposure to asbestos can cause serious lung problems and cancer, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) regulates asbestos abatement projects. MDNR and EPA are working together to provide guidance which will help residents minimize their exposure to asbestos. For example, EPA has advised MDNR to segregate asbestos and certain other types of wastes for proper disposal. EPA will work with state and local agencies to assist with asbestos sampling as necessary.

Handling debris with asbestos, by such actions as demolishing buildings and loading debris into trucks, may release asbestos from building materials, lead from paint, and other pollutants. Because of the possible presence of asbestos and metals in building debris, locations for managing the debris are being carefully chosen to minimize potential exposures.

Identifying Asbestos-Containing Materials

- Asbestos-containing products which may be part of the debris left by the tornado include: asbestos-cement corrugated sheet, asbestos-cement flat sheet, asbestos pipeline wrap, roofing felt, vinyl-asbestos floor tile, asbestos-cement shingles, millboard, asbestos-cement pipes, and vermiculite-attic insulation.

People with questions about the removal of asbestos-containing material should contact the MDNR Spill Line at 573-634-2436.

What sampling will EPA do to monitor the possible release of asbestos to the air as a result of the tornado recovery efforts?

At other tornado sites, asbestos has not been found at levels of health concern. However, because of the age of many structures and the extent of tornado damage in Joplin, asbestos may be present among the debris and could be released. Handling debris can cause particles to get into the air where they can be breathed. In coordination with FEMA, EPA is taking air samples to check for the presence of asbestos and particulate matter. EPA's air sampling will be adjusted as conditions change. The amount of demolition, the results of air sampling, and other factors may result in changes to air sampling. Asbestos sampling in additional areas will be considered as more information becomes available on the nature of demolition and disposal activities.

Asbestos Safety Information

Asbestos Information for People Returning to Tornado-Damaged Properties

People involved in disaster cleanup efforts may be exposed to asbestos-containing materials. The use of NIOSH-approved N-100, P-100 or R-100 respirators is recommended to minimize exposure to asbestos. However, even with the use of such respirators, there is still some level of risk of exposure to asbestos for those who are not trained to recognize and work with asbestos-containing material. If worn improperly, respirators may provide little or no protection. Instructions for proper use of a respirator must be followed carefully and closely. Adequate respiratory protection can only be assured for individuals who have been trained, certified, and fit-tested for their protective equipment.

NIOSH-approved N-95 respirators DO NOT provide adequate protection from asbestos exposure. They are not recommended for this use and should not be worn for this purpose. Look for NIOSH approval information on a respirator's package to tell the difference between an N-95 and an N-100 respirator.

If a large amount of asbestos-containing material is present, the hiring of an asbestos-certified contractor should be considered. Workers should use equipment specifically designed to protect them from asbestos exposures during demolition and debris handling, as required by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

IMPORTANT NOTE TO CONTRACTORS AND EMPLOYERS: EPA is NOT waiving OSHA regulations related to this cleanup. All pertinent safety regulations must be observed.